

Historic, Archive Document

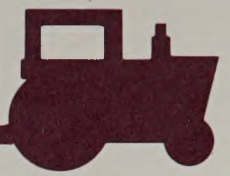
Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

United States Department of Agriculture
Cooperative State Research Service
Office for Small-Scale Agriculture

The Office for Small-Scale Agriculture

Reserve
aHD1476
.U6U54
1989





The Beginning

The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA) in December 1986. The office was created to improve the flow of information about small-scale farming to agricultural producers and consumers—the American public. The office also functions as a liaison to other USDA agencies in identifying and directing research and educational programs to improve the usefulness of information received by small-scale farmers.

The Situation

Most of America's 2.2 million farms are considered "small" with 7 out of 10 grossing less than \$40,000 a year. Small-scale farms control one-third of all agricultural resources, such as land, buildings, machinery, and equipment. Small-scale farm families are major purchasers of agricultural inputs and consumer goods and services. They contribute to the well-being of their rural communities and are likely to be an integral part of the community where they farm, supporting community schools, churches, and other social and civic activities.

The Past

A recent downturn in agriculture, manufacturing, and mining industries caused many farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and residents to encounter severe economic stress. To assist with improving these conditions, many Federal, State, and private agencies are directing additional resources toward increasing profitability in agriculture and revitalizing rural communities. There is a growing awareness that small-scale farmers make significant contributions to both the agribusiness and consumer industries of rural communities.

The Present

Small-scale farmers comprise a growing segment of American agriculture. The trend is expected to continue as the number of part-time farmers increases. The small-scale farm category is a diverse group with varying farm and family goals as well as types of enterprises.

Categories of small-scale farmers include:

Full-time farmers depending solely on the farm for a living (a decreasing category).

Part-time farmers who supplement the farm income with off-farm employment.

Individuals with nonfarm jobs who get into part-time farming as a means of establishing a business entity.

For these categories, small-scale farming is a business with a bottom line. Profit is what counts.

There is an additional category, however: the hobby farmer, who is not profit motivated but farms to be close to



nature and for relaxation. In many instances the hobby farmer ultimately becomes a small-scale agricultural entrepreneur and farms for profit. Enterprises grown by small-scale farmers range from traditional row crops to vegetables and fruits, livestock, aquaculture, and specialty crops such as flowers, herbs, and goats. Differences exist in the various regions of the United States; but, generally, small-scale agriculture involves people utilizing a wide variety of alternatives for gainful employment.

Small-scale farmers in all categories have needs and problems that must be addressed if they are to maintain a competitive economic status, contribute to the recovery of agriculture, and give social strength to rural America. Federal, State, and private systems are available to assist U.S. farmers to recover and maintain their competitive edge. The Office for Small-Scale Agriculture was created from a need at USDA to identify the expertise of the various systems and to gather and disseminate information for maximizing the potential effectiveness of small-scale entrepreneurs.

The Six Initiatives

OSSA has several ongoing and planned initiatives:

- *Newsletter.* Published quarterly, "Small-Scale Agriculture Today" provides information on small-scale agriculture with a focus on relevant topics, technology, and calendar events.
- *Factsheets.* Ten in a series of factsheets, "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative," are currently available. Titles are DESSERT VINES, EXOTIC FRUITS, EXOTIC LIVESTOCK, FOLIAGE PLANTS, GOATS, HERBS, MUSHROOMS, SHEEP, SPECIALTY VEGETABLES, and WILDFLOWERS. Others are in preparation. Copies are available at most county offices of the Cooperative Extension Service and also by electronic mail on the Electronic Dissemination of Information (EDI) system.
- *Small-Scale Agriculture Directory.* Published in May 1989, the directory lists 500 Federal and State experts in research and education. This directory is a valuable tool, enabling people to improve the flow of information on small-scale agriculture through networking. Copies (stock no. 001-000-04539-3) are available at \$5.50 from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20402. Or call the Order Desk, (202) 783-3238.
- OSSA has produced a 9-minute color video, "The Perfect Tomato, The Ideal Blackberry, Making Money in Small-Scale Agriculture." The price is \$10 (make



1022347349

check payable to OGPA, Photography Division). Write to USDA, Office of Information, Photography Division, Room 4404, South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1300.

- *Assay of ongoing USDA research and extension endeavors.* To be released late in 1989, this assessment will provide a new financial and human resource account for measuring the USDA/State commitment to small-scale agriculture. Further, the new information will enable policymakers to set future research and educational agendas for bridging the gap between available information and need.
- *Monitoring and implementing conferences on small-scale agriculture.* OSSA plans to conduct conferences and events in cooperation with other USDA agencies to ensure that all people interested in small-scale agriculture are provided with adequate information.

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture
USDA/CSRS/SPPS
Aerospace Building
Room 342
14th & Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250-2200
Telephone: (202) 447-3640
Dialcom: AGS3037
FAX: (202) 475-3179

Howard W. ("Bud") Kerr, Jr., Director

Revised August 1989

